

Eráp turns down SONA invite, says it's a 'waste of time'

Former President Joseph Estrada turned down an invitation from the House of Representatives to attend President Arroyo's State of the Nation Address (SONA) tomorrow in the Batasan

by JOSE ROOEL CLAPANO

Pambansa Complex in Quezon City.

In a statement, Estrada said that he would just waste his time listening to the "fairy tales" of Mrs. Arroyo.

"It would be a waste of time to go to Congress only to listen to the fairy tale story of the economy from Mrs. Arroyo. I believe that what is more important than listening to her lies is to tell the truth—that the Filipino maidans are now suffering from hunger and that poverty is worsening in our country today," Estrada said.

He said the Arroyo Administration should admit that inflation is rising and the economy is worsening.

The World Bank has even tagged the country as the most corrupt country in East Asia, he added. "Any proclamation of progress and sound economic fundamentals would be like rubbing salt on the wounds of the poor who are the ones hurting from the real state of the nation today," Estrada said.

Senators advised President Arroyo not to devalue her upcoming State of the Nation Address so as not to further erode her credibility before the public.

Senate President Manuel Villar Jr. said Mrs. Arroyo should tell the true state of the nation and not mislead the people.

He said it would probably help the President regain a bit of her credibility if she would admit all the problems and even the promises that were broken by her administration.

Senate Majority

Leader Francis Pangilinan said he was not surprised with the outcome of the Pulse Asia survey because the Arroyo government had been rocked by corruption scandals and attempts to suppress the truth.

"If these are what the people have been seeing, we cannot blame them if they lose trust and become skeptics and doubtful," Pangilinan said.

Sen. Loren Legarda said the people could see the real state of the nation and "it's a sorry state that we are in."

Villar, Pangilinan and Legarda will attend the SONA as part of their obligation under the Constitution but said they would listen to the SONA with caution and determine whether the President had been truthful.

"She must state the true state of the nation and then present her strategy in general, not detailed solutions like what she did in her past SONAs," Villar said.

JDV to miss SONA

Rep. Jose de Venecia Jr. of the fourth district of Pangasinan will not attend the SONA and will instead go to a United Nations conference Bangkok, Thailand.

He said this would also be the launching of the Southeast Asia Peace Initiative organized by officials of the Thai government and the Universal Peace Federation.

"Pangasinan long suffer by more than 50 percent will be exaggerated," said the former Speaker and former ally of the President.

Two weeks ago when he visited Dagupan City to distribute construction materials for typhoon victims, De Venecia said he would attend the SONA, saying it is his duty to do so as congressman.

He said the UN meeting would be offering solutions to the typhoon victims in Indonesia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, among others.

Bishops appeal to GMA

The Ecumenical Bishops Forum (EBF) yesterday issued a statement reiterating their appeal to the government and their flock to work toward attaining peace and order and resolving the socio-economic issues that continue to plague the country.

EBF co-chairpersons Kaloocan Bishop Doergacras Iniguez of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and Bishop Solito Tampuso of the United Methodist Church (UMC) said that they are saddened by reports that despite

the country's rich resources and hard working people, many problems plague the country.

The EBF on Tuesday held 23 to 25 and affirmed their unequivocal stance for just and lasting peace.

"We are witnesses to the continuing state of un-peace in the country today."

In a statement, the religious leaders asked that the peace talks between the government and the communist last July National Democratic Front (NDF) resume. "As Church people we long for a kind of peace in our country that is fundamentally based on justice."

The Bishops also urged the Arroyo Administration to scrap the value added tax (VAT) on oil products, repeal the oil deregulation law, hasten the approval and implementation of the proposed P125 across the board salary increase nationwide, and implement an effective and genuine land reform program.

"We firmly believe that there will be no peace when our people live in hunger and misery, when the tillers remain landless, when workers do not receive just wages, when urban and rural communities are dislocated to cater to big business interests. There will be no peace as long as the people's fundamental socio-economic rights are grossly subordinated; if not utterly neglected in favor of power, profits and privileges for the rich few," the EBF added.

Transport strike vs SONA

At least 20,000 drivers and operators in Central Luzon are expected to join the transport strike against the SONA.

Rolando Catangbal, spokesman of the Samahang mga Traser at Operator sa Pilipinas (STOPP) in Central Luzon, said the strike would be held to protest the continued increase in the prices of diesel.

"Even if we seek another lane in transport lane, I don't think it will ever be enough to fill in the sacrifices of public transport drivers and operators," he said.

Danielo Ignacio, chairman of the Bulacan Jeepney Transport Alliance Inc., said transportation would be paralyzed in Bulacan, Batanga, Pampanga, Zambales, Tarlac and Aurora.

Ignacio said government officials should not ignore the plight of jeepney drivers. The Health Alliance for Democracy (HEAD) expects nothing but empty promises and lies in the SONA. With Evelyn Macalain, Eva Visperas, Sheila Cristofano, Aurora Calica, Ding Cervantes, Dingo Balabog